

## II

# The Armenian Image in Classical Texts

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My task in this essay is to attempt to elucidate the image of the Armenians as found in classical texts, the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. But it will be interesting to tackle the texts in early Armenian as well, to see if there is any correlation between the way in which Armenians were seen and the way in which they looked back on themselves and their past.

Several difficulties immediately present themselves. In the first place, Armenia was not often at the center of the stage for the writers of classical antiquity. Not that they ignore Armenia; but the references to Armenians and things Armenian are somewhat haphazard, scattered over a long period of time, and give only a patchy view of Armenian life. Second, Armenian literature does not begin until the fifth century A.D. There is therefore no contemporary Armenian source with which to compare, say, Xenophon or Plutarch. And then Armenian literature is imbued with a Christian outlook—which is different from the outlook not only of the Greeks and Romans, but of the earlier Armenians themselves.

Equally significant is the fact that Armenian historians interpret the past in different ways for their own purposes. But it does not mean that they do not share certain characteristics, or, to put it another way, that there are not certain characteristics common to the class that they represent.

So I begin by considering the main features that Greek and Roman authors associate with Armenia. It will then be possible to amplify the picture by comparing their comments with the more copious material in the works of early Armenian writers.

Additional Note: For the development of the Armenian 'self image' see item IV below.

The first significant references to the Armenians occur in Herodotus (III 93); he says that they formed the thirteenth satrapy of the Old Persian empire. The Alarodians, who were included in the eighteenth satrapy, were another of the peoples occupying what we now call Armenia. They represented the earlier inhabitants; for the Armenians were regarded not as indigenous to the region but as settlers. They came from Phrygia, says Herodotus, when he describes the Armenian contingent in Xerxes' army at the time of the invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. (VII 73). At a later date Strabo gives a long account of the Armenian people, stressing that they derive from Thessaly. Their ancestor Armenus accompanied Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece and remained in the East. Strabo adds (XI 14.12): "They also say that the clothing of the Armenians is Thessalian, for example, the long tunics which in tragedies are called Thessalian . . . since the Thessalians in particular wore long robes, probably because they of all the Greeks lived in the most northerly and coldest region. . . . And they say that their style of horsemanship is Thessalian."

The natural geographic features of Armenia, the mountain ridges interspersed with plains and valleys, meant that the country was inhabited by many diverse tribes. Strabo notes that as the tribes range the mountains they are given to brigandage (*Geography* XI 12.4). Without stressing overmuch the lawless side of Armenian life, we must admit that the restlessness of the small units and the rivalry of families or clans remained a permanent feature of Armenian society. Hence, also, the slowness with which the Armenian language became the common tongue; according to Strabo, only after the time of Artaxias (Artashes) in the early second century B.C. did the inhabitants of Armenia speak the same language (*ibid.* 14.5).

But by the time of Tigran the Great, when the Romans first had direct dealings with Armenia, the monarchy had imposed some cohesion and unity on the country. Tigran, of course, was not a typical king, in that he had briefly brought under his sway many non-Armenian areas to the south and west. But to Plutarch Tigran was the image of a barbarian potentate, whose subjects lived in a state of

oppression quite incompatible with the rights of free Roman citizens. It is worth quoting the first contacts between Tigran and the messenger for the Roman general Lucullus (Plutarch, *Lucullus*, 21):

Now the sway of the Armenian was intolerably grievous to the Greeks. Above all else, the spirit of the king himself had become pompous and haughty in the midst of his great prosperity. All the things which most men covet and admire, he not only had in his possession, but actually thought that they existed for his sake. For though he had started on his career with small and insignificant expectations, he had subdued many nations. . . . Many were the kings who waited upon him, and four, whom he always had about him like attendants or body-guards, would run on foot by their master's side when he rode out, clad in short blouses, and when he sat transacting business, would stand by with their arms crossed. This attitude was thought to be the plainest confession of servitude, as if they had sold their freedom and offered their persons to their master disposed for suffering rather than for service.

Appius, however, was not frightened or astonished at all by this pomp and show, but as soon as he obtained an audience, told the king plainly that he was come to take back Mithridates, as an ornament due to the triumph of Lucullus, or else to declare war against Tigranes. Although Tigranes made every effort to listen to this speech with a cheerful countenance and a forced smile, he could not hide from the bystanders his discomfiture at the bold words of the young man. It must have been five and twenty years since he had listened to a free speech. . . . He was vexed with Lucullus for addressing him in his letter with the title of King only, and not King of Kings. . . .

And when Lucullus does invade Armenia: "Since the first messenger who told Tigranes that Lucullus was coming had his head cut off for his pains, no one else would tell him anything" (§ 25).

But there was more than a touch of Greek culture in Armenia. Plutarch claims that the Carthaginian Hannibal showed King Artaxias the advantages of the site for his capital Artaxata and drew a plan for it (*Lucullus*, 31). Whatever the truth of that story, Tigran's later capital Tigranocerta had a Greek colony and a theater. Tigran's

son Artavazd was famous as an author of tragedies, orations, and histories (in Greek, of course, not Armenian), some of which were extant in Plutarch's day (Plutarch, *Crassus*, 33). And when king Tiridates returned from his reception in Rome, Nero gave him money and artisans to rebuild Artaxata (Dio Cassius, *Epitome* to Book LXIII).

Even so, Armenian life did not revolve around the city in the Greco-Roman sense. Although the Armenian kings built numerous capitals along the Araxes River, their importance was economic, but not political or social. A side comment in Tacitus is revealing (*Annals* XII.45): "Nothing is so completely unknown to barbarians as the appliances and refinements of siege operations—a branch of warfare perfectly familiar to ourselves."

The economic wealth of Armenia was known to the earliest Greek writers. Herodotus (V 49) informs us that the Armenians were "rich in flocks." The general richness of Armenia in agriculture and husbandry is emphasized by Xenophon, whose *Anabasis* gives us the most elaborate firsthand account of the country in antiquity. We cannot repeat here details of all the provisions served by the Armenians to the Greek mercenaries: the various meats, vegetables, fruits, wines, beer (only the olive does not grow properly here, notes Strabo [*Geography* XI 13.7]). But since eating and drinking remained important aspects of Armenian social life—at least among the nobility—it is worth noting even at the early date of Xenophon the emphasis that the Armenians put on hospitality (*Anabasis* IV 5.30-33):

On the next day Xenophon took the village chief and set out to visit Cheirisophus; whenever he passed a village, he would turn aside to visit the troops quartered there, and everywhere he found them faring sumptuously and in fine spirits; there was no place from which the men would let them go until they had served them a luncheon, and no place where they did not serve on the same table lamb, kid, pork, veal and poultry, together with many loaves of bread, some of wheat and some of barley. And whenever a man wanted out of good fellowship to drink another's health, he would draw him to the bowl, and then one had to stoop over and drink from it, sucking like an ox. To the village

chief they offered the privilege of taking whatever he wanted. He declined for the most part to accept anything, but whenever he caught sight of one of his kinsmen, he would always take the man to his side. Again, when they reached Cheirisophus, they found his troops also feasting in their quarters, crowned with wreaths of hay and served by Armenian boys in their strange, foreign dress.

Eight centuries later another foreigner comments on the laws of hospitality, this time laws that had been broken at the murder of the Armenian King Pap (Ammianus Marcellinus XXV 22): "By such treachery was credulity basely deceived, and at a banquet, which ought to be respected even on the Euxine Sea, before the eyes of the god of hospitality a stranger's blood was shed [note the play on Euxine; *euxinos* = hospitality]."

The wealth of Armenia in natural products and her mines for metals and precious stones are noted by many writers. As a sign of this wealth, says Strabo (XI 14.9), not only could the Armenians pay tribute in gold, silver, and horses, they could also put tens of thousands of fully armed cavalry into the field (cf. Plutarch, *Crassus*, 19). And the fame of the Armenians as soldiers was to endure for many centuries. Procopius in the time of Justinian, for example, describes how the Byzantine palace guard was selected from among Armenians (*Secret History* XXIV 15.17). Another consequence of the richness of Armenia was that Antony's troops suffered from dysentery in 36 B.C. because of the excess of everything that they found to eat (Plutarch, *Antony*, 50).

The physical size of Armenia, too, was a matter of comment. Justin in the third century A.D. for example, abbreviating the history of the earlier Pompeius Trogus, notes (XLII 2):

But since we here make a transition to Armenia, we must go a little further back into its origin; for it is not right that so great a kingdom should be passed in silence, since its territory, next to that of Parthia, is of greater extent than any other kingdom. Armenia, from Cappadocia to the Caspian Sea, stretches over a space of eleven hundred [Roman] miles, and is seven hundred miles in breadth.

Of the more personal qualities ascribed to the Armenians we have already noted their pride—vainglory to the Romans—and their hospitality. Of course, our classical authors are often using the supposed qualities of Armenians as a foil for the qualities they wish to emphasize in their own heroes or villains. So the Armenian is a barbarian slave in contrast with the free Roman gentleman, whereas Armenian hospitality is contrasted with a specific case of Roman treachery. In this regard it is very interesting to read Dio Cassius' account of Tiridates' visit to Rome in 66 A.D. in order to receive the crown of Armenia from Nero. For one has the distinct impression that the Armenian is used here as a foil more to pour scorn on Nero than to praise Tiridates. Having described the investiture in some detail, Dio then adds (*Epitome* to Book LXIII): "Such, then, was this occasion; and of course they had a costly banquet. Afterwards Nero publicly sang to the lyre, and also drove a chariot, clad in the costume of the Greens and wearing a charioteer's helmet. This made Tiridates disgusted with him; but he praised Corbulo [the general], in whom he found only this one fault, that he would put up with such a master." And a little later Dio has another story: "Tiridates one day viewed an exhibition of the *pancratium* [a kind of combined boxing and wrestling match], at which one of the contestants after falling to the ground was struck by his opponent. When the king saw this, he exclaimed: The fight is unfair. It is not fair that a man who has fallen should be struck."

Tacitus, however, is not so complimentary about Tiridates (*Annals* XV 31): "Accustomed as he was to foreign pride, he lacked all knowledge of ourselves who prize the essentials of sovereignty and ignore its vanities."

On the other hand, the Armenian spirit could be admired. Dio Cassius, for example, speaks of the Armenians taken captive and brought with King Artavazd to Egypt by Antony in 34 B.C. (XLIX 40):

Then he left his legions in Armenia and went once more to Egypt, taking the great mass of booty and the Armenian [king] with his wife and children. Sending them with the

captives ahead of him into Alexandria in a kind of triumphal procession, he himself drove into the city upon a chariot, and he not only presented to Cleopatra all the other spoils but brought her the Armenian and his family in golden bonds. She was seated in the midst of the populace upon a platform plated with silver and upon a gilded chair. The barbarians, however, addressed no supplications to her, nor made obeisance to her, though much coercion was brought to bear upon them and many hopes were held out to them to win their compliance, but they merely addressed her by name; this gave them a reputation for high spirit, but they were subjected to much ill-treatment on account of it.

The point of gold or silver bonds is brought out also by Ammianus Marcellinus. Describing the arrest of King Arshak by treachery, he says (XXVII 12.3): "After his eyes had been gouged out, he was bound in silver chains, which among that people is regarded as a consolation, though an empty one, for the punishment of men of rank." Much earlier, in Herodotus III 130, we read of Darius giving a Greek as a present a pair of golden foot chains.

References to the religion of the Armenians are few. Tiridates is described by Dio Cassius as a devotee of Mithra, and by Suetonius (*Life of Nero* XXX 6) as a magus, that is, a Zoroastrian priest, which is appropriate in view of his Parthian origin. But again Suetonius's comments tell us more about Roman attitudes than about the real nature of the religion of the magi: "He had brought magi with him, had initiated Nero into their banquets; yet the man giving him a kingdom was unable to acquire from him the magic art. Therefore let us be convinced by this that magic is detestable, vain and idle; and though it has what I might call shadows of truth, their power comes from the art of the poisoner, not of the magi."

The idea of the Armenian religion being related to that of the Persians brings us back to the supposed ancestor of the Armenians, Armenos (*var.* Armenios). For at the end of the last book of his *Republic* Plato introduces a model of the structure of the universe in the form of a vision attributed to Er, son of Armenios, a native of Pamphylia. The tenth-century lexicon called *Suida* explains

the name Er as a Hebrew one, no doubt influenced by its appearance in Luke 3.28 as the name of one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ. But the earlier Christian writer and philosopher Clement of Alexandria identified Er with Zoroaster (*Stromata* V 157). Whatever the origin of the name, Plato clearly meant his readers to ascribe an Eastern origin of great antiquity to the myth.

The only serious observer of Armenian religion was Strabo, who draws attention to the special respect paid by Armenians to Anahit (XI 14.16):

Now the sacred rites of the Persians, one and all, are held in honour by both the Medes and the Armenians; but those of Anaitis are held in exceptional honour by the Armenians, who have built temples in her honour in different places, and especially in Acilisene. Here they dedicate to her service male and female slaves. This, indeed, is not a remarkable thing; but the most illustrious men of the tribe actually consecrate to her their daughters while maidens; and it is the custom for these first to be prostituted in the temple of the goddess for a long time and after this to be given in marriage; and no one disdains to live in wedlock with such a woman. Something of this kind is told also by Herodotus in his account of the Lydian women.

The honor paid Anahit is, of course, well known from the later Armenian Christian sources. And this same shrine of hers, according to Agathangelos, was the site of the initial confrontation between King Trdat and Saint Gregory the Illuminator. When the shrine was later destroyed, there was—again according to Agathangelos—an armed conflict between the demons and the forces of piety (§ 786):

After this he [Gregory] came to the neighboring province of Ekeleats [the Greek Acilisene]. Here the demons appeared in the places of worship of the most important shrines of the Armenian kings, in the temple of Anahit in the town of Erez. The demons gathered together and gave battle in the form of an army carrying shields; with a tremendous shout they made the mountains echo. They were put to flight, but as they fled the high walls collapsed and were flattened. Those who had arrived, saint Gregory, the king and the pious army, broke into pieces the golden image

of the female deity Anahit, and they completely destroyed and pillaged the place, seizing the gold and silver.

This brings us to the question of Christianity in Armenia. The earliest reference to the Armenians being Christian appears in Tertullian (who died c. 220). In his treatise *Adversus Judaeos* 7, he lists various peoples who have accepted the Christian religion: "Parthi, Medi, Elamitae, et qui inhabitant Mesopotamiam, Armeniam, Phrygiam, Cappadociam, et incolentes Pontum et Asiam et Pamphylam. . . ." This list is, in fact, a verbatim quotation from Acts 2.9 ff., where in the place of Armenia the Greek text has Judaea. The geographical order, however, does not favor Judaea; in the Greek the form of Judaea is an adjective and not a noun; and this list names the countries whose languages the Jews were surprised to hear the apostles speaking—whereas it would not be surprising if they spoke their own native tongue. For these reasons some ancient writers proposed the names of other countries. Tertullian and Augustine have Armenia, Jerome has Syria, John Chrysostom proposes India, and Eusebius omits it. So Tertullian's evidence is to be rejected.

The next foreign author to refer to Christians in Armenia is Eusebius. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (VI 46.2) he mentions a certain Meruzanes (in Armenian, Mehruzhan) as bishop in Armenia to whom Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria from 247 to 264, wrote a letter. The problem here is what to understand by Armenia, since the term could be used of Lesser Armenia, west of the Euphrates, where there were Christian communities in the third century. This Mehruzhan is certainly unknown to Armenian tradition. And, curiously enough, the Armenian translator of Eusebius here uses the non-Armenian form *Armenia* (not *Hayastan*), strongly implying that he thought of it as a Roman province and not as standing for the whole of his native country.

Later in his *History*, when discussing Maximin's persecutions in the East in 312-313, Eusebius says (IX 8.2): "The tyrant had the further trouble of war against the Armenians, men who from ancient times had been friends and allies of the Romans; but as they were Christians and

exceedingly earnest in their piety towards the Deity, this hater of God, by attempting to compel them to sacrifice to idols and demons, made of them foes instead of friends, and enemies instead of allies."

Whether or not we are to interpret this persecution as the occasion for the martyrdom at Ejmiatsin of Rhipsimé, Gaiané, and their companions, as Paul Peeters would have us believe,<sup>1</sup> we have at any rate now reached the point where the foreign sources and Armenian traditions begin to converge. (To say that they "correspond" would be going too far.) So it is time to take stock and to compare the comments on Armenians found in the classical texts we have been discussing with the local Armenian traditions.

With regard to the origin of the Armenians, there is no suggestion in Armenian sources that they derive from Phrygia or from Thessaly. Rather, Armenia was settled by the eponymous ancestor Hayk from Mesopotamia. Two points in the tradition are worth noting. According to both Moses Khorenatsi (I 10) and the *Primary History* there were some settlers in Armenia before the arrival of Hayk and his family. So the Armenians were not the earliest inhabitants of the land. And then the Armenian traditions are integrated into the Christian traditions based on the genealogies of Noah's descendants as found in the scriptures. Hence the various references to the descendants of Hayk as the race of Japheth or of Torgom or of Ashkenaz. Here the influence of Eusebius's *Chronicle* played a very important role. We may also note in passing that the Armenian writers of the classical period pay no particular attention to the descent of Noah's ark on the mountains of Ararat (not the modern Mt. Ararat, of course, but the mountains of southern Armenia around Lake Van). Although Faustos (III 10) claims that Jacob, bishop of Nisibis, went searching for the ark in the province of Korduk', there is never any suggestion that the Armenians had any special preeminence because of Noah's landing there.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta Bollandiana*, 60 (1942), 106.

<sup>2</sup> This is in contrast to the claim in Scarron's ridiculous play *Don Japhet d'Armenie* (1653), Act II, sc. 5:

As for Armenia being within the Iranian cultural orbit, that is the subject of a separate communication.<sup>3</sup> So I pass over it with simply a reminder that according to Moses Khorenatsi (I 9) the only written record of early Armenian traditions was kept in Parthian archives. This archive, like those of Armenian documents at Edessa or Ani, is fictitious. But the point is that the Armenian historian does not look to the West; rather, he assumes that it is in the Iranian sphere that Armenian culture has its origins.

Armenian writers do not describe the geography of their native land in detail. They frequently refer to Armenia as being "in the Northern regions." Again, this is relative to Iran rather than to Greece or Rome. The only geographer of the classical period, the anonymous author of the *Ashkharhatsoyts*, was interested in the political divisions of Armenia, not the natural features. Nor do the shorter documents that give routes and distances between places have anything to say about the physical features of the land, its natural products, and so forth. So there is nothing to compare with Strabo or Pliny. We do find, however, numerous passages describing individual sites; for example, the beauty of the area around Lake Van where Moses claims that Semiramis built a summer palace, or the description of Aghtamar in the Continuator to Thomas Artsruni. These are idealized images, though based on personal knowledge of the sites. As an idealized image of the province of Ayrarat we might quote a few lines from the reflections of King Arshak III on leaving for exile in the West, as found in the pages of Łazar P'arpetsi—who himself had been forced to leave the country for some time (I 8):

With all these thoughts in his mind, King Arshak departed,  
abandoning the fortunate and patrimonial inheritance of  
his ancestors, the magnificent, famous and illustrious province

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Car je suis don Japhet, de Noé petit-fils:  
D'Arménie est mon nom, par un ordre préfix,  
Qu'avant sa mort laissa ce fameux patriarche,  
Parce qu'en Arménie un mont reçut son arche.

<sup>3</sup> Nina G. Garsoïan, "The Locus of the Death of Kings: Iranian Armenia—The Inverted Image," pp. 27-64, below.

of Ayarat, which produces all varieties of plants and crops, which is stocked to overflowing with all resources necessary for the livelihood, pleasure and recreation of men. Its plains are extensive and abundant with game; its encircling mountains are beautifully situated and rich in pasture, and abound with cloven-footed animals and ruminants, and many others in addition. From their summits flow streams watering the plains that need no irrigation. These provide for the numberless multitudes in the capital, women, men and their families, an abundance of bread and wine, vegetables of sweet savour and the taste of honey, and various types of olive. To those who turn their gaze for the first time to the flanks and level tops of the hills, the colours appear not to be flowers but garments, scattered so copiously, richly and luxuriantly. The overflowing abundance of the grass satisfies the numberless herds of domesticated donkeys and the ferocious herds of wild animals which thrive and fatten and show their whole bodies well covered with fat. The strong and sweet odour of the flowers which surrounds the valiant hunters, archers and herders who live in the open, gives health, strengthens the senses of the mind, and brings renewal. There are found every sort of root and plant useful for the needs of medicine; they are prepared according to the knowledgeable skill of the most expert physicians—ointments efficacious in dispelling maladies and potions which restore health to those who have long suffered from pain. . . .

The plains not only reveal and offer what is advantageous for men's needs, but even more they indicate to diligent workers the profits that are hidden under the earth, that they may gain treasure for themselves and the pleasures of this world; they serve for the majesty of kings and the increase of revenue—gold and copper and iron and precious stones. These skillful hands receive and fashion grandiose ornaments for kings; they fit them into tiaras and crowns and garments embroidered in gold. With irrigation the plains provide natural sweetness for those eating the varieties of victuals. Likewise not in vain does the delectable plain of Ayarat nourish in itself stems of [sugar] cane; from it are also born [silk] worms for purple decoration, offering profit and delight for those who appreciate luxury. Furthermore, the courses of the rivers teem with many species of fish, great and small, of varied flavor and appearance, which fill those who labor and diligently toil with joy and gratitude for their prosperity and sated stomachs.

The land also nourishes through its canals an abundance of birds for the delight and vigor of the nobility addicted

to the hunt: flocks of partridges and pheasants that murmur sweetly, that love the craggy places, lurk among the rocks and hide in holes; or the race of wild birds, fat of flesh and sweet to the taste, that dwell among the reeds and hide among the bushes and thickets; and the large and powerful aquatic birds that seek out weeds and feed on moss—the swan, duck and goose, and many other numberless coveys of birds. With encircling nets, snares and traps, groups of princes and nobles' sons come out to hunt; some chase after the onagers and wild goats with encouraging shouts to the archers; others gallop after herds of stags and birds, demonstrating their prowess with the bow; others again with swords, like men in single combat, overthrow herds of massive boars and kill them. Many of the youngest noble children with their tutors and servants hunt various kinds of birds with falcons and bring them back to increase the delight of the feast. Thus, when each one has had his fill of the chase, joyfully they return.

They are awaited according to daily custom by the children of the fishermen who fathom the waters; running to meet the nobles, they bring and offer to their lords fish they have caught, the young of various wild birds and eggs from the islands in the river. The nobles willingly accept a portion from them, and from their own catch give liberal presents in return. So, they return to each one's mansion loaded with every blessing, and on those who remained occupied at home they bestow choice offerings, being especially liberal to strangers. One can see at everyone's repast heaped up upon each other the multitude of game with their heads set out in order; they give festive joy to those who eat the fish and meat. But even more than by the sweetness of these delicacies, by spiritual food—psalms and prophet's canticles—they bless Christ the liberal donor who fills us with all his blessings.

You will note that it is primarily life on the land which interests Lazar. Like most early Armenian writers he reflects the social life of the class to which he belonged—or at least of the patrons for whom he was writing. So the comments in Moses Khorenatsi on townspeople in Vatarshak's organization of the country are unusual (II 8):

He appointed judges at court and judges in the cities and towns. He ordered that the townspeople be more highly esteemed and honored than the peasants, and that the peasants

should respect the townspeople like princes. But the townspeople were not to vaunt themselves too much over the peasants but to live on brotherly terms for the sake of harmony and life without rancor—which are the causes of prosperity and peace. [I refrain from commenting on the fact that this information supposedly came from the Parthian archives.]

The picture of Tigran the Great as the image of an Armenian king as found in Plutarch is not reflected in Armenian tradition—naturally enough. For Moses, Tigran was not a despotic autocrat, but a king who was just and impartial. His main claim to fame was his prowess at war (I 24):

He of all our kings was the most powerful and intelligent and the most valiant. . . . He extended the borders of our territory and established them at their extreme limits in antiquity. . . . Who among true men and those who appreciate deeds of valor and prudence would not be stirred by his memory and aspire to become such a man? He was supreme among men and by showing his valor he glorified our nation. . . . He was just and equal in every judgment, and he weighed all the circumstances of each case impartially. He did not envy the noble nor did he despise the humble, but over all alike he spread the mantle of his care.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to compare this idealized image of a remote figure with the more contemporary—if equally idealized—image of the monarch in John Catholicos. For he borrows verbatim from Moses to describe the elevation of Ashot to royal status:<sup>5</sup> “Of great wisdom and gentleness of speech, he did not emulate the rich in banqueting yet neither did he despise the poor; but over all he spread the mantle of his care. In the scales he weighed first himself and then the conduct of everyone else. In short, he never withheld anything humankind might need.” On the other hand, the Continuator to Thomas Artsruni describes *his* patron’s

<sup>4</sup> The image of Tigran as modest is reflected in English Renaissance drama, e.g., Beaumont and Fletcher’s *A King and No King*.

<sup>5</sup> Tiflis, 1912, p. 174.

claim to royal status in different terms. For him the Bagratid Smbat (son of Ashot just mentioned) had abdicated his responsibilities (IV 3): He did not pursue the way of peace, he did not send tribute to the Caliph in accordance with Christ's command to give to Caesar what was Caesar's, and he had brought much harm on the holy church and God's people. Whereas, says Thomas, Gagik was worthy of the crown because he was an orthodox and faithful Christian.

One could pursue further the matter of idealized portraits to consider the ideal noble—valiant, hospitable, and generous, but proud of his honor—or the ideal religious figure whose asceticism is a source of general inspiration, but space does not permit. I therefore conclude with a few more general comments on what Armenian writers say about the Armenians as a whole. How, if at all, did they conceive of Armenians as different from other people, even if only in a negative fashion by way of contrast with non-Armenians?

Since classical Armenian literature is the product of Christian writers, we might begin by asking how Armenians viewed their church in relation to other Christian churches. That raises a host of problems, but one or two points are perhaps relevant here. In the first place, the Armenians were not missionary minded. Only in the first century of organized Christianity in Armenia, in Faustos or Koriun, do we read of proselytising beyond the borders of Armenia. But once the Armenian church had formulated its own theological position and developed its individual ritual, these traditions were regarded as specifically Armenian and not for export.

In *Efshé* we already find the emphasis that to abandon the covenant, which is a covenant of Armenians, is to be both a traitor and an apostate. *Efshé* was strongly influenced by the Maccabees, whose concept of religion included the whole traditional Jewish way of life. Again and again, the same phrases used by the Jewish heroes in those books are echoed in *Efshé*: it is for their ancestral customs that the Armenians are fighting. So it is significant that although *Efshé* was indebted to Christian hagiographical texts for

much of his imagery, his *explicit* models are not the early Christian martyrs who died for their faith alone regardless of ethnic background, but the generals and leaders of ancient Israel.

Although the Armenians were Christian, that was not the most important factor for writers like Elishé; rather, their religion was only the framework within which something more important was happening. The Armenians were not the defenders of Christendom at large holding back the heathen on the eastern border. They were defending their ancestral way of life and their individual traditions. It is therefore not at all surprising that in later generations those ecumenically minded Armenians who endeavored to bridge the gap between the Christian churches in the East met with no lasting success. Most Armenians were not willing to lose their Armenianness as part of a larger church. And those who for one reason or another accepted communion with the Greeks were regarded as traitors to their country. Although the Greeks were Christian that did not matter. The Zoroastrian Persians were "impious and irreligious" for Elishé as were the Muslims for Thomas Artsruni. But they were not regarded in any worse light than the Byzantines. Hence the famous comment of the Catholicos Moses II; when summoned by the emperor Maurice to attend a synod in Constantinople where the union of the churches might be effected, he exclaimed (*Narratio*, § 102): "I shall not cross the river Azat or eat fermented bread or drink warm water." The river Azat then marked the frontier between Eastern Armenia and Byzantine territory, but Moses is playing on its meaning "free." The references to fermented bread and warm water are to differences between Greeks and Armenians in the celebration of the liturgy, differences that are as significant and irreconcilable as differences in the theology of the Christian faith itself.

Armenians were also kept separate from non-Armenians by their language. Sēbeos's comment on Smbat Bagratuni is relevant here. About A.D. 600 Smbat found a colony of Armenians in eastern Iran who had forgotten their native tongue. So he had a priest sent to them to teach them

Armenian again as well as to minister to their spiritual needs (chap. 14).

As for the view that Armenians had of their own language, there do not seem to be many comments in the sources. One reads of the horribly cacophonous tongues of the inhabitants of the Caucasus, so I presume that by contrast Armenian is to be considered euphonious. But I am not aware of any claims that Armenian was the language spoken in Paradise by Adam. The eighth-century scholar Stephen of Siunik<sup>6</sup> has a few lines on Armenian as compared to other languages which are worth quoting: "All the variations and different properties of words and expressions of different people derive from an original and uncultivated language. The Greek language is delicate; Latin is severe; the language of the Huns is arrogant; Syriac is diffident; Persian is luxurious; the language of the Alans is pleasing; that of the Goths humorous; Egyptian is hard; Indian tremulous. But Armenian is delightful and capable of containing all the virtues of the others.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to point to anything in the early sources that gives a picture of Armenians as a whole in a more positive manner. There are examples of brave Armenians and of cowardly ones; of sincere, hospitable Armenians, and of treacherous ones; of Armenians given to things of the spirit, and of others addicted to the pleasures of the flesh. But there is no simple definition of an Armenian *per se*. Rather, an Armenian is one who is born into a group that speaks a distinct language (or at least did so at one time), and who holds to certain individual traditions including a Christian faith that is exclusive rather than inclusive. Over the centuries military, economic, and social circumstances varied enormously. So the "typical" or "ideal" Armenian kind of life underwent tremendous variations. But there did remain some internal sense of solidarity that tends to elude the penetration of an external observer.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in C. F. Neumann, *Mémoire sur la vie et les ouvrages de David* (Paris, 1829), pp. 27-28; the passage is repeated in Vardan's *Hawak'umn Patmut'ean* (Venice, 1862), § 5.